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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 003793

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ITALIAN TROOPS IN OEF

CLASSIFIED BY: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES EMIL SKODON FOR REASONS 1.5(B)(D)

11. (C) CHARGE, ACCOMPANIED BY POLOFF, MET WITH ACTING DIPLOMATIC ADVISOR TO THE PRIME MINISTER FRANCESCO TALO ON AUGUST 20 TO DISCUSS A RANGE OF ISSUES (OTHER ISSUES REPORTED SEPTTEL). CHARGE TOLD TALO THAT THE U.S. WAS PLEASED WITH THE HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE OF THE ITALIAN OEF CONTINGENT IN KHOST, AND ASKED WHAT THE REACTION MIGHT BE SHOULD ITALY BE ASKED TO CONSIDER EXTENDING ITS OEF DEPLOYMENT PAST THE SCHEDULED SEPTEMBER 15 DEPARTURE DATE. TALO REPLIED THAT THE ANSWER WOULD DEPEND LARGELY ON WHETHER THE MOD CAN FIND THE RESOURCES. IN THE EVENT A FORMAL USG REQUEST TO EXTEND IS MADE, THE PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE WOULD LOOK FIRST TO THE MOD TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT ON AVAILABLE RESOURCES, ALREADY STRETCHED VERY THIN. WITH THE MAJORITY OF SENIOR ITALIAN OFFICIALS OUT OF ROME ON HOLIDAY, IT MAY BE DIFFICULT TO GET A QUICK RESPONSE EVEN IF A FORMAL REQUEST IS MADE.

12. (C) TALO WENT ON TO SAY THAT ITALY NOW HAS 13,000 TROOPS DEPLOYED OVERSEAS; MORE, HE STRESSED, THAN EVEN GERMANY. ITALY KNEW IT WAS PUSHING AGAINST THE MOD'S CEILING OF DEPLOYED TROOPS WHEN THE COMMITMENT TO CONTRIBUTE 1,000 SOLDIERS TO OEF WAS MADE, TALO SAID. SINCE THEN, ITALY HAD DEPLOYED EVEN MORE TROOPS IN ORDER TO RESPOND TO USG REQUESTS FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO OIF, AND WAS STRETCHED EVEN THINNER. (NOTE: WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE MOD CONSIDERS THE MAXIMUM SUSTAINABLE NUMBER OF TROOPS ABROAD TO BE 10,000, WITH ROOM FOR AN UNSUSTAINABLE 11-12,000 SURGE. END NOTE.)

13. (C) COMMENT. WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM OUR INFORMAL APPROACHES TO THE ITALIAN DEFENSE GENERAL STAFF AND TO THE PM'S STAFF IS THAT AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES IS KEY AND THE RESOURCE PICTURE IS NOT ENCOURAGING. IN THE ABSENCE OF OFFICIAL INSTRUCTIONS, WE HAVE NOT CONSULTED WITH VACATIONING SENIOR ITALIAN DECISION-MAKERS. HOWEVER, IN AN INTERVIEW TO BE RELEASED ON AUGUST 22, DEFMIN MARTINO REPORTEDLY SAID THAT THE ITALIAN OEF CONTINGENT WILL NOT REMAIN IN AFGHANISTAN AFTER ITS MANDATE EXPIRES ON SEPTEMBER 15. ITALIAN TROOPS ARE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN WITHDRAWING FROM BAGHRAM ON AUGUST 22. IF THE US MILITARY DECIDES AN EXTENSION IS NECESSARY, A HIGH-LEVEL DOD CALL TO MARTINO MAY BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO PERSUADE THE MOD TO CONSIDER FILLING THE GAP.  
SKODON

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